

Thomas N. Berry Estate  
Stillwater Vicinity  
Payne County  
Oklahoma

HABS No. OK-51

HABS  
OKLA  
60-STIWAY  
1-

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS  
WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

THOMAS N. BERRY ESTATE

HABS No. OK-51

HABS  
OKLA,  
60-STINAX,  
1-

Location: South of the city of Stillwater, Oklahoma in the east half of the southeast quarter of section 26 of T2E R19N.  
UTM Location: Zone 14  
Northeast corner 675447 3995638  
Southeast corner 675458 3995395  
Southwest corner 675171 3995635  
Northwest corner 675160 3995392

Present Owner: Thomas N. Berry and Co.

Present Occupant: Thomas N. Berry and Co.

Present Use: Home Offices

Statement of Significance: The estate is an excellent example of a Colonial Revival architecture located in a naturalistic landscape of the English "Landscape Garden" School. It was built in the oil boom days of Oklahoma by a minor oil baron in this part of the state.

Part I. Historical Information

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The entire estate was purchased by Thomas N. Berry in pieces. The first purchase was from William Paul Wood in 1927 and was located in the North half of the Southeast quarter of section 26 T19N R2E. The South half of the Southeast quarter of the same section was purchased from George Hesper in 1928. These respective parts were sold to Harriet V. Berry, the wife of Thomas Berry, in 1928 and then 1942. It remained in her name until her death in 1958 at which time title was transferred to her children with Thomas E Berry and William A. Berry as executors of her will. On the 11th of October 1961 her heirs sold the property to the Thomas N. Berry and Co. for \$10.00. This is the company founded by the original owner of the house and which had been headquartered on the site for some time. The only other transaction occurred on the 21st of November 1980 when the Oklahoma Department of Transportation purchased a portion of the eastern side varying from 100 feet wide in the north to 66 feet in the south. The property has remained outside of the city limits, with the western edge of the property being contiguous with part of the city limits

2. Date of erection: 1929 for both the house and the grounds.
3. Designers: The house and the landscaping were done at the same time. The architect was Fred L. Knoblock. At the time of the construction of the house, he was residing in Tulsa, Oklahoma but was originally from Stillwater. The name of the designer for the landscape is not known at this time but the name of the firm was the Tulsa Landscape and Nursery Co. It can be inferred from various sources that the designer was C. Burton Fox. It is known that he was president of the company in 1929 and Jack Berry, the youngest son of the family, remembers him being about the house a good deal. Whether he was or not, we know that he resided down the street from the company and that he designed the Memorial Cemetery in Tulsa. At this time it is not known were he started practicing landscape design.
4. Alterations and additions: The landscape was never installed as planned. Some of the omissions that are known for certain are: The tennis courts were installed when the company moved into the garage, not when the house was completed; The smaller of the two ponds had always existed, but enlarged when the tennis courts were put in; The boathouse was never erected. Most of the additions occurred because of the company. When it first moved in, a small house was built to house the servants, because it moved into the garage. As the company grew, it expanded the garage, and just this year added the mobile home.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

As founder of Thomas N. Berry and Company, Thomas Berry is of local significance. He was an important figure in the development of Stillwater. He gained prominence as an oil man during the boom years in Oklahoma.

C. Sources of Information:

1. The January 5, 1929 edition of the Stillwater Gazette, a copy of which can be found in the microfilm collection of the Edmond Low Library, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma.
2. A personal interview with Jack Berry, the youngest son of Thomas and Harriet Berry.
3. Records located in the Payne County Court Clerks Office, Payne County Courthouse, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

4. The Tulsa City Directory for 1928 and 1929, located in the Tulsa City/County Library, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

## PART II. LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Landscape character: This is a typical example of a moderately sized estate for a middle level oil baron of the boom era in Oklahoma.
2. Condition of landscape materials: Good

### B. Description of Site:

1. Over-all dimensions: The site is roughly 805 feet running north-south and 847 feet running east-west. The eastern boundary is along the right of way for U.S. highway 177. Beginning on a point 390' north of the S.E. corner of the N 1/2 of the S.E. 1/4 of section 26 T19N R2E and 99.89' due west of the eastern section line, go S00°25'52" a distance of 790.64', then S7°16'26"E a distance of 259.72', then go west 1,265.35' to a point on the east R/W of South Boomer Road, then northwest along the R/W 351.9' to the point of curvature, then along the curve of radius 3,226.83' for 848.7' to a point 390' north of a parallel line then east 1,823.61' to the point of beginning. That is the meets and bounds description of the entire estate as it exists today.
2. Soil: The soils are deep, well drained, loamy soils which developed under prairie vegetation from materials weathered from shale or sandstone.
3. Plant Materials: The predominant surviving plant material from the original planting is Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*). Some shrubs have also survived such as a large planting of *Vitex* south of the pond, privet hedge is still quite abundant as well. Some of the ornamental shrubs along the drive are of original plantings. A good portion of the plants around the ponds and the fence line are native plants which have come up voluntarily. Overall the plant material is in healthy condition, the exception being some of the older ornamentals which are not well adapted to this area.
4. Water Features: There are two ponds on the site. The larger pond is at a lower elevation than the other and underground seepage occurs along the slope between the two. The larger pond also has a major problem with algal growth, while the other is quite clear. The remains of the pier can be found

floating in the large pond, with the posts still in place on the northern promontory.

5. Over-all description: The landscape design is based on principals of the "English Landscape Gardening" School, with an attempt to create a naturalistic setting. Evidence of this is the winding drive, the curvaceous shape of the pond, and the clumped plantings of local plant materials. However the eclecticism of the period can be seen in the combination of the naturalistic style of the landscape with the formal design of the Colonial Revival house.

### PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of the documentation made during the 1989 Charles E. Peterson Prize project undertaken by part of the Design IV class of the Landscape Architecture Program, Oklahoma State University. This was the final project for the spring semester, with a month to the documentation of the landscape. It is felt that the house is worthy of documentation, but should be done by people appropriately suited to that task.

The project was completed under the direction of Charles Leider, Associate Professor. It was a team effort with William Cole as team leader. The information above was gathered by Michael Egan. The information on the measured drawings was gathered by Mr. Cole, Mr. Egan, Joe Grubbs, Mitch Gwartney, Spencer Matheny, and Ernestine Mbroh, all fourth year students in the program.